

## Tentative deal set to improve Digital Domain Park in Port St. Lucie | Video

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — Digital Domain Park, the spring training home of the New York Mets, is a step closer to getting a facelift and Mets officials are hoping renovations will be done in time for their 2012 training schedule.

County commissioners unanimously agreed Tuesday to a tentative deal to give the Mets \$2.5 million from taxes on hotel stays to turn right-field seating into premium seats. The stadium scoreboard also will be improved.

County officials still must work with a financial consultant to arrange the terms of the deal, but the basic parameters include renegotiating a bond agreement. The Mets, who moved to Port St. Lucie in 1988, would extend their current commitment to remain in the city from 2018 to 2023.

"We're excited about it," Mets Director of Florida Operations Paul Taglieri said. "We're looking forward to getting the process started on getting this thing constructed prior to spring training next year."

County Attorney Dan McIntyre said the money for the agreement would not come from the county's general fund operations.

The stadium enhancements could increase the likelihood that the county attracts a second Major League Baseball team to the stadium. The Mets are in talks with two teams.

County officials hope a second team in Port St. Lucie could secure the future of spring training on Florida's East Coast, which has seen a small exodus of teams leaving the area. Within the past three years, the Los Angeles Dodgers and Baltimore Orioles have left Florida's East Coast; now only the Mets, Florida Marlins, St. Louis Cardinals and Washington Nationals remain in the region.

The Dodgers left Vero Beach in 2008 and the city has not been able to get a new team for the stadium. When teams leave, those remaining must either play more games against the same opponents or travel farther for competition.

The Nationals have acknowledged interest in relocating their spring training home from Viera. The Marlins and the Cardinals play at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter.

Officials with the Mets and county estimate it would cost \$10 million in improvements to bring in a second team. The costs do not include the \$2.5 million for upgrading the right-field terrace. Rather, the \$10 million would be used for four new practice fields, a viewing tower, clubhouse, cart paths and equipment. The funding source has not yet been identified, though County Commissioner Chris Dzadovsky said the county could discuss the matter with the state.

The new agreement would include an out clause for the Mets should fewer than four teams, including the Mets, train on the East Coast. Orlando teams are included in the clause. The Atlanta Braves train in Orlando and the Houston Astros train in Kissimmee.

But Taglieri said the deal indicates' the Mets commitment to Port St. Lucie.

"Everything that's on the table clearly states that we're happy in St. Lucie County and we want to remain here," Taglieri said.



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